

Arms and The Woman

By Harold MacGrath

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CHAPTER I.

The first time I met her I was a reporter in the embryonic state and she was a girl in short dresses. It was in a garden surrounded by high red brick walls which were half hidden by clusters of green vines and at the base of which nestled earth beds radiant with roses and poppies and peonies and bushes of lavender lilacs, all spilling their delicate ambrosia on the mild air of passing May. I stood, straw hat in hand, wondering if I had not stumbled into some sweet prison of flowers which, having run disobedient ways in the past, had been placed here by Flora and forever denied their native meadows and wildernesses. And this vision of fresh youth in my path, perhaps she was some guardian nymph. I was only 22, a most impressionable age. Her hair was like that rare October brown, half dun, half gold; her eyes were cool and restful, like the brown pools one sees in the heart of the forests, and her lips and cheeks cozened the warm vermilion of the rose which lay ever so lightly on the bosom of her white dress. Close at hand was a table upon which stood a pitcher of lemonade. She was holding in her hand an empty glass. As my eyes encountered her calm, inquiring gaze my courage fled precipitately, likewise the object of my errand. There was a pause; diffidence and embarrassment on my side, placidity on hers.

"Well, sir?" said she in a voice the tone of which implied that she could readily understand her presence in the garden, but not mine.

As I remember it, I was suddenly seized with a great thirst. "I should like a glass of your lemonade," I answered, bravely laying down the only piece of money I possessed. Her stern lips parted in a smile, and my courage came back cautiously—that is to say, by degrees. She filled a glass for me, and as I gulped it down I could almost detect the flavor of lemon and sugar.

"It is very good," I volunteered, passing back the glass. I held out my hand, smiling.

"There isn't any change," coolly.

I flushed painfully. It was fully four miles to Newspaper row. I was conscious of a sudden pride. Presently the object of my errand returned. Somewhat down the path I saw a gentleman reclining in a canvas swing. "Is that Mr. Wentworth?" I asked.

"Yes. Do you wish to speak to him? Uncle Bob, here is a gentleman who desires to speak to you."

I approached. "Mr. Wentworth," I began, cracking the straw in my hat. "My name is John Winthrop. I am a reporter. I have called to see if it is true that you have declined the Italian portfolio."

"It is true," he replied kindly. "There are any number of reasons for my declining it, but I cannot make them public. Is that all?"

"Yes, sir; thank you," and I backed away.

"Are you a reporter?" asked the girl as I was about to pass by her.

"Yes, I am."

"Do you draw pictures?"

"No, I do not."

"Do you write novels?"

"No," with a nervous laugh.

There is nothing like the process of interrogation to make one person lose interest in another.

"Oh, I thought perhaps you did," she said and turned her back to me. I passed through the darkened halls of the house and into the street. I never expected to see her again, but it was otherwise ordained. We came together three years later at Block Island. She was 25 now, gathering the rose flowers of her first season. She remembered the incident in the garden, and we laughed over it. A few dances, two or three evenings on the verandas watching the sea, moonlit, as it sprawled among the rocks below us, and the even tenor of my way ceased to be. I appreciated how far she was above me, so I worshiped her silently and from afar. I told her my ambitions, confidences so welcome to feminine ears, and she rewarded me with a small exchange. She, too, was an orphan and lived with her uncle, a rich banker, who as a diversion consented to represent his country at foreign courts. Her given name was Phyllis. I had seen the name a thousand times in print; the poets had idealized it and the novelists had embalmed it in tender phrases.

It was the first time I had ever met a woman of the name of Phyllis. It appealed to my poetic instinct. Perhaps that was the cause of it all. And then she was very beautiful. In the autumn of that year we became great friends, and through her influence I began to see beyond the portals of the mansions of the rich. Matthew Prior's Chloes and Sir John Suckling's Euphlias lost their charms. Henceforth my muse's name became Phyllis. I took her to the opera when I didn't know where I was going to breakfast on the morrow. I sent her roses and went without tobacco, a privation of which woman knows nothing. Often I was plunged into despair at my distressed circumstances. Money to her meant something to spend; to me it meant something to get. Her income bothered her because she could not spend it; my income was mortgaged a week in advance and did not bother me at all. This was the barrier at my lips. But her woman's intuition must have told her that she was a part and parcel of my existence.

I had what is called a forlorn hope—a rich uncle who was a planter in Louisiana. His son and I were his only heirs. But this old planter had a mortal antipathy to my side of the family. When my mother, his sister, married Alfred Winthrop in 1859, at the time when the north and south were approaching the precipice of a civil war, he considered all family ties obliterated. We never worried much about it. When mother died, he softened to the extent of being present at the funeral. He took small notice of my father, but offered to adopt me if I would assume his name. I clasped my father's hand in mine and said nothing. The old man stared at me for a moment, then left the house. That was the first and last time I ever saw him. Sometimes I wondered if he would remember me in his will. This, of course, was only when I had taken Phyllis somewhere or when some creditor had lost patience.

One morning in January, five years after my second meeting with Phyllis, I sat at my desk in the office. It was raining, a cold thin rain. The window was blurred. The water in the steam pipes went banging away. I was composing an editorial which treated the diplomatic relations between this country and England. The roar of Park row distracted me. Now and then I would go to the window and peer down on the living stream below. A dense cloud of steam hung over all the city. I swore some when the copy boy came in and said that there were yet a column and a half to fill and that the foreman wanted to "close up the page early." The true cause of my indisposition was due to the rumors rife in the office that morning. Rumors which emanate from the managing editor's room are usually of the sort which burden the subordinate ones with anxiety. The London correspondent was "going to pieces." He had cabled that he was suffering from nervous prostration, supplementing a request for a two months' leave of absence. For "nervous prostration" we read "drink." Our London correspondent was a brilliant journalist. He had written one or two clever books. He had a broad knowledge of men and affairs, and his pen was one of those which flashed and burned at frequent intervals, but he drank. Dan's father had been a victim of the habit. I remember meeting the elder Hillars. He was a picturesque individual, an accomplished scholar, a wide traveler, a diplomatist and a noted war correspondent. His work during the Franco-Prussian war had placed him in the front rank. After sending his son Dan to college he took no further notice of him. He was killed while serving his paper at the siege of Alexandria. Dan naturally followed his father's footsteps both in profession and in habits. He had been my classmate at college, and no one knew him better than I except it was himself. The love of adventure and drink had ended the life of the one. It might end the life of the other.

The foreman in the composing room waited for some time for that required column and a half of editorial copy. I lit my pipe, and my thoughts ran back to the old days, to the many times Dan had paid my debts and to the many times I had paid his. Ah, me! Those were days when love and fame and riches were elusive, and we went in quest of them. The crust is hyssop when the heart is young. The garret is a palace when hope flies unfettered. The most wonderful dreams imaginable are dreamed close to the eaves. And when a man leaves behind him the garret he also leaves behind the fondest illusions. But who—who would stay in the garret?

And as my thoughts ran on the question rose, Whom would they send in his place—Dan's? I knew London. It was familiar ground. Perhaps they might send me. It was this thought which unsettled me. I was perfectly satisfied with New York. Phyllis lived in New York. There would be time enough for London when we were married. Then I began to build air castles. A newspaper man is the architect of some splendid structures, but



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he thoughtlessly builds on the sand when the tide is out. Yes; foreign correspondence would be all well enough, I mused, with Phyllis at my side. With her as my wife I should have the envy of all my fellow craftsmen. We should dine at the embassies, and the attacks would flutter about us, and all London would talk of the beautiful "Mrs. Winthrop." Then the fire in my pipe bowl went out. The copy boy was at my elbow again.

"Hang you!" said I.

"The foreman says he's coming down with an ax," replied the boy.

It was like churning, but I did manage to grind the copy. I was satisfied that the United States and Great Britain would not go to war over it.

The late afternoon mail brought two letters. I opened the one from Phyllis first. It said:

Dear Jack—Uncle Bob has a box for the opera tonight, but he has been suddenly called to Washington—possibly, but he would not say. Aunt and I want you to go with us in his stead. Ethel and her fiancé, Mr. Holland, will be together, which means that aunt and I will have no one to talk to unless you come. "Carmen" is to be sung. Please do not fail me. Phyllis.

Fail her! I thought not.

Then I read the second letter. I read it three or four times, and even then I was not sure that I was not dreaming. I caught up my pipe again, lit it and lit it. I read the letter once more. I was solemnly informed that my uncle was dead and that I was mentioned in the will and that if I would kindly call at the Hoffman House the following morning a certain sum of money would be given to me. I regretted that I had reached that age when a man's actions must be dignified although alone; otherwise I dare say I should have danced the pas seul. Whatever my uncle's bequest might be, I believed that it would make me independently rich. Phyllis was scarcely an arm's length away now. I whistled as I looked up my desk and proceeded down stairs and sang a siren song into the waxen ears of the cashier.

"You have only twenty coming this week, Mr. Winthrop," said he.

"Never mind," I replied. "I'll manage to get along next week." It was only on very rare occasions that I drew my full pay at the end of the week. I dined at a fashionable restaurant. As I slipped my wine I built one of my castles, and Phyllis reigned therein. There would be a trip to Europe every summer, and I should devote my time to writing novels. My picture would be the frontpiece in the book reviews, and wistful paragraphs would tell of the enormous royalties my publishers were paying me. I took some old envelopes from my pocket and began figuring on the backs of them as to what purposes the money should be put. It could not be less than \$50,000, perhaps more. Of course my uncle had given a harbor to a grudge against me and mine, but such things are always forgotten on the deathbed. Fortune, having buffeted me, was now going to make me one of her favorite children. I had reached the end of the long lane.

As I left the restaurant I decided to acquaint Phyllis with my good luck and also my desire that she should share of it. I turned into a florist's and had a dozen roses sent up to her. They were American Beauties. I could afford it now.

I found Phyllis thrumming on the piano. She was singing in a low voice the aria from "Lucia." I stood on the threshold of the drawing room and waited till she had done. I believed her to be unaware of my presence. She was what we poets call a "dream of loveliness," a tangible dream. Her neck and shoulders were like satin, and the head above them reminded me of Sappho's which we see in marble. From where I stood I could catch a glimpse of the profile, the nose and firm chin, the exquisite mouth, to kiss which I would gladly have given up any number of fortunes. The cheek had that delicate curve of a rose leaf, and when the warm blood surged into it there was a color as matchless as that of a Jack rose. Ah, but I loved her! Suddenly the music ceased.

"There is a mirror over the piano, Jack," she said without turning her head.

So I crossed the room and sat down in the chair nearest her. I vaguely wondered if at the distance she had seen the love in my eyes when I thought myself unobserved.

"I thank you for those lovely roses," she said, smiling and permitting me to press her hand.

"Don't mention it," I replied. It is so difficult for a man to say original things in the presence of the woman he loves. "I have great news for you. It reads like a fairy tale, you know; happy ever afterward, and all that."

"Ah!"

"Yes. Do you remember my telling you of a rich uncle who lived in the south?"

"Is it possible that he has left you a fortune?" she cried, her eyes shining.

"You have guessed it."

"I am very glad for your sake, Jack. I was beginning to worry about you."

"Worry about me?"

"Yes. I do not understand how a newspaper man can afford to buy roses four or five times a week—and exist." She had the habit of being blunt and frank to her intimate friends. I secretly considered it an honor when she talked to me like this. "I have told you repeatedly to send me flowers only once a week. I'd rather not have them at all. Last week you spent as much as \$30 on roses alone. Mr. Holland does not do that for Ethel, and he has a million."

"I'm not Holland," I said. "He doesn't think that is—I do not think he"—Then I foundered. I had almost said, "He doesn't care as much for Ethel as I do for you."

Phyllis pretended not to note my embarrassment. The others came in then, and conversation streamed into safer channels.

When we entered the box at the opera, the curtain had risen. Phyllis and

I took the rear chairs. They were just out of the glare of the lights.

"You are looking very beautiful to-night," I whispered lowly. I was beginning business early. There was no barrier at my lips.

"Thank you," she replied. Then with a smile, "Supposing I were to say that you were looking very handsome?"

"Oh," said I, somewhat disconcerted, "that would be rather embarrassing."

"I do not doubt it."

"And then it would not be true. The duty we men owe to a beautiful woman is constantly to keep telling her of it."

"And the duty we women owe to a fine looking man?" a rogue of a dimple in her cheeks.

"Is it to explicitly believe all he says regarding your beauty?" I answered, evading the question. "A man may tell a woman that she is beautiful, but a woman may not tell a man that he is fine looking—that is, in public."

"The terms are not fair."

"That may be true, but they make the wheels of the social organization run smoother. For instance, if I met a strange woman and she told me that I was handsome I shouldn't be able to speak again the whole evening. On the other hand, a beautiful woman after you say that you are delighted to meet her expects the very next remark to concern her good looks."

"Your insight is truly remarkable," she said, the dimple continuing its elusive maneuvers. "Hush, here comes Carmen!"

And our voices grew faint in the swell of melody. Mrs. Wentworth was entranced. Her daughter was fondly gazing at the back of her fiancé's head. Phyllis had turned her face from me to the stage. As for myself, I was not particularly interested in the cigarette girl. It was running through my head that the hour had arrived. I patted my gloves for a moment, then I drew a long breath.

"Phyllis!" said I. There was a quaver in my voice. Perhaps I had not spoken loud enough. "Phyllis!" said I again.

She turned quickly and gave me an inquiring and at the same time nervous glance. "What is it?"

"I want to tell you something I have never dared to tell you till now," I said earnestly. The voice on the stage soared heavenward. "I love you. Will you be my wife?"

Ah, me! Where were those drooping eyelids, that flush, that shy, sweet glance, of which I had so often dreamt? Phyllis was frowning.

"Jack, I have been afraid of this," she said. "I am so sorry, but it cannot be."

"Oh, do not say that now," I cried, crushing my gloves. "Wait awhile. Perhaps you may learn to love me."

"Jack, I have always been frank to you because I like you. Do you suppose it will take me five years to find out what my heart says to any man? No. Had I loved you I should not have asked you to wait. I should have said yes. I do not love you in the way you wish. Indeed I like you better than any man I know, but that is all I can offer you. I should be unkind if I held out any false hopes. I have often asked myself why I do not love you, but there is something lacking in you, something I cannot define. Some other woman will find what I have failed to find in you to love."

I was twisting my gloves out of all recognition. There was a singing in my ears which did not come from the stage.

"Look at it as I do, Jack. There is a man in this world whom I shall love and who will love me. We may never meet. Then he shall be an ideal to me and I to him. You believe you love me, but the love you offer is not complete."

"Not complete?" I echoed.

"No. It would be if I returned it. Do you understand? There is in this world a woman you will truly love and who will return your love in its fullness. Will you meet? That is in the hands of your destinies. Shall I meet my ideal? Who knows? But till I do I shall remain an old maid."

I nodded wearily. A dissertation on affinities seemed ill timed.

"And now," she said, "this beautiful friendship of ours must come to an end." And there were tears in her eyes.

"Yes," said I, twisting and untwisting the shreds of my gloves. It seemed as though the world had slipped from under my feet and I was whirling into nothingness. "My heart is very heavy."

"Jack, if you talk like that," hastily, "you will have me crying before all these people."

Unfortunately Ethel turned and saw the tears in her cousin's eyes. "Mercy, what is the matter?" she asked.

"Jack has been telling me a very pathetic story," said Phyllis, with a pity in her eyes.

"Yes; something that happened to-night," said I, staring at the programme, but seeing nothing, nothing.

"Well," said Ethel, "this is not the place for them," turning her eyes to the stage again.

The concluding acts of the opera were a jangle of chords and discords, and the hum of voices was like the murmur of a faroff sea. My eyes remained fixed upon the stage. It was like looking through a broken kaleidoscope. I wanted to be alone, alone with my pipe. I was glad when we at last entered the carriage. Mrs. Wentworth immediately began to extol the singers, and Phyllis, with that tact which is given only to kind hearted women, answered most of the indirect questions put to me. She was giving me time to recover. The direct questions I could not avoid. Occasionally I looked out of the window. It had begun to rain again. It was very dreary.

"And what a finale, Mr. Winthrop!" cried Mrs. Wentworth.

"Yes, indeed," I replied. To have loved and lost, and such a woman, was my thought.

"The new tenor is an improvement. Do you not think so?"

"Yes, indeed." No more to touch her hand, to hear her voice, to wait upon her wishes.

"It was the most brilliant audience of the season."

"Yes, indeed," I murmured. Those were the only words I could articulate. The carriage rumbled on.

"Does Patti return in the fall?"

"Yes." Five years of dreaming and then to awake!

And then the carriage mercifully stopped.

Mrs. Wentworth insisted that I should enter and have some coffee. I had so few words at my command that I could not invent even a flimsy excuse. So I went in. The coffee was tasteless. I put in four lumps of sugar. I stirred and stirred and stirred. Finally I swallowed the contents of the cup. It was very hot. When the agony was past, I rose and made my adieu.

Phyllis came to the door with me. "Forget what I have said," I began, fumbling the doorknob. "I suppose I



Phyllis came to the door with me.

was an ass to think that you might love me. They say that it is a malady. Very well. With a few prescribed remedies I shall recover."

"You are very bitter."

"Can you blame me," clicking the latch back and forth, "when all the world has suddenly grown dark?"

"There are other eyes than mine," gently.

"Yes, but they will light other paths than those I shall follow."

"Jack, you are too manly to make threats."

"That was not a threat," said I. "Well, I shall go and laugh at myself for my presumption. To laugh at yourself is to cure. There is no more wine in the cup, nothing but the lees. I'll have to drink them. A wry face, and then it will all be over. Yes; I am bitter. To have dreamed as I have dreamed and to awake as I have! Ah, well, I must go on loving you till—"

"Till she comes," supplemented Phyllis.

"You wrong me. It is only in letters that I am versatile. Forgive my bitterness and forget my folly."

"Oh, Jack, if you knew how sorry I am! I shall forgive the bitterness, but I will not forget what you term folly. It's something any woman might be proud of, the love of an honest, dear, good fellow. Good night." She held her hand toward me.

"Good night," I said, "and God bless you!" I kissed the palm of her hand, opened the door and then stumbled down the steps.

I do not remember how I reached home. It was all over. My beautiful castle had fallen in ruins about my ears.

To be continued.

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